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Chief of Naval Personnel Rallies Record Fall Graduating Class

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Article By: Barbara Honegger

Tuesday, December 23, 2008



Chief of Naval Personnel Vice Adm. Mark Ferguson III rallied one of the largest graduating classes in Naval Postgraduate School history at Fall 2008 commencement ceremonies in King Hall, Dec. 19.

Almost 400 students earned graduate degrees in the morning exercises officiated by Dean of Students Kathryn Hobbs, including five Ph.D.s, two Electrical Engineer, 201 Master of Science, 109 Master of Arts, 81 Master of Business Administration, two Executive Master of Business Administration, and seven dual degrees. Crossing the stage were active duty officers from all the U.S. military services – 107 Navy, 21 Marine Corps, 70 Air Force, 53 Army; one Navy Reserve and one Air Force Reserve; 55 Department of Defense civilians; and 82 international officers.

"Vice Admiral Ferguson is one of the strongest supporters of the Naval Postgraduate School we have in Navy leadership today," NPS President Daniel Oliver said in introducing the keynote speaker. Turning to the Navy's 55th personnel chief who also serves as Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Manpower, Personnel, Training and Education, Oliver added, "We're all grateful for your advocacy and support, and we wish you a warm welcome here today."

In his keynote address, Ferguson recalled his own NPS commencement (Computer Science, with distinction, 1984) over two decades before and strongly encouraged the graduates to foster a "culture of mentorship" in their future commands.

"It's a distinct honor for me to be speaking to you today -- one of the largest graduating classes NPS has ever produced," Ferguson said. "In looking over your thesis topics, I'm very impressed with the range of your research, which represents a tremendous investment by your service and which will be of lasting value to the nation and the Department of Defense." Ferguson stressed the importance of recognizing and fostering diversity in the future workplace.

"By 2042, minorities will become the [collective] majority of the U.S. population, so reaching out and tapping this diversity is a strategic imperative for us," he said. "In the increasingly intense competition for talent, we're doing everything we can to capture the very best, wherever and whoever they are, to nurture them and give them the support they need to serve."

"One of the most important actions you can take in your careers is to mentor young people," he noted. "In the organizations you lead, find ways to create a mentoring culture. And to successfully complete for future talent and realize the Navy's goal of being a Top-50 employer, we need to act on the fact that, more and more, work is not a place but a results-oriented outcome, and that those outcomes can be realized virtually and digitally. In this increasingly connected world of 'digital natives' like yourselves, a growing percentage of the future workforce will both demand and be able to work globally, collaboratively and flexibly anytime, anywhere. We're now taking major steps now to facilitate this, like the Navy's new Virtual Command, which facilitates working via the web."

"The big question," Ferguson concluded, "is 'Are you ready?' The fact that you're graduating from NPS proves you've developed the intellectual rigor the Navy needs to think and lead anew."

to be bold and to inspire. You're up to the task and the nation needs you. I wish you 'Fair winds and following seas.'"

After the ceremony, graduates and their family members gathered in the Barbara McNitt Ballroom in Herrmann Hall for the official Fall 2008 cake cutting ceremony featuring Oliver, the Provost and Executive Vice President Leonard Ferrari and top graduate, Lt. Cmdr. Joseph Cascio, winner of the Monterey Council of the Navy League Award for Highest Academic Achievement.

Immediately following the cake cutting Oliver presented Ferguson and fellow 1984 NPS classmate, Army Lt. Gen. Thomas Turner, now Commanding General of United States Army North (Fifth Army), with Distinguished Alumni Awards. Ferguson graduated with distinction in computer science, and Turner with distinction in Systems Technology/C4I, both in December 1984.

Turner, who said the Distinguished Alumnus Award was a surprise, had flown from Texas to NPS to support the sole Fall 2008 graduate from Army North, retired Air Force Lt. Col. And C-130 pilot Vincent Sharp.

Sharp, now Exercise Specialist for Army North's Civil Support Readiness Group-West, earned a Master of Arts in Homeland Security.

"When I was at NPS back in the '80s, there was great interest by the Army to get soldiers who were operators into C4I, and I was fortunate to have been one of those," Turner said. "My classmates from that group have done very well, reaching the highest ranks in the Army."

"It's a great honor for Gen. Turner to have taken the time out of his busy schedule to come all the way from San Antonio for my graduation," said Sharp, who is the second graduate of the NPS Homeland Security program from Army North.



As they compared notes and exchanged goodbyes with fellow classmates, some of the freshly-minted grads looked back on the previous 18 months to two years at NPS.

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The best part of the NPS experience is that it gives you a piece in your operational career. "Myself and many classmates had multiple deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan before coming here – to interact with your military colleagues and discuss the really critical issues that face the country," said Army Maj. Neil Snyder, a graduate in Defense Analysis. "What I've learned here at NPS will also enable me to do my job better in my future career."

"Being able to interact with members from the other services and international students, and to get their perspectives on what we're [the U.S.] is doing, is invaluable," agreed Snyder's DA classmate, Army Maj. Daniel Hedman. "You can't get that anywhere else but the Naval Postgraduate School."

"I wouldn't trade being at NPS for anything," added Army Maj. Anthony Gibbs, who earned an MBA from the Graduate School of Business and Public Policy. "Not anything."

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